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ABSTRACT

Teacher evaluations tend to be like clothes. Whatever is in vogue at the time is utilized extensively by those who are attempting to remain modern and current. If you stay around long enough, the "hot" methods of today will probably recycle to be the new discovery of the future. In the end, each school district develops an evaluation process that is going to be most agreeable to the teachers, the administrative staff, the parents, the students, and the board of education. There is no perfect system. But whichever system is utilized, the purpose for which it is to be used should be clearly delineated and understood by all the participants. The two major purposes of evaluation are the improvement of instruction and the documentation of inefficiency. We must continue to document those staff members who are ineffective, inefficient, and detrimental to our school districts. But we also must spend more energy diagnosing the needs of our staff and utilizing the information for the improvement of the instructional program. (Author/DW)

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HOW TO EVALUATE TEACHER PERFORMANCE

by

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We didn't mind the old, building principal, method of teacher evaluation because the rating forms didn't mean much. They were stashed away in the teachers' files, never used to make book on "bad" teachers.[1]

The concept of teacher evaluation that has permeated the thinking of many teachers is pretty well summarized in the above quotation. For years teachers have been evaluated by the school principal and, in most instances, the results of the evaluation never left the principal's office. Traditionally, then, the principal has been the evaluator and the teacher has been the object of the evaluation process.

FROM THE OLD TO THE NEW

During the early years of teacher evaluation, the bases for assessment were traits and attributes. Educators had the idea that good teaching was somehow related to good grooming, good speech, good looks, and a pleasant personality. The next major trend in teacher evaluation related to the skills and competencies of the teacher. Teachers were evaluated on the basis of how well lesson plans were organized, the ability to prepare adequately, the ability to develop self-direction in students, the ability to present clear and definite assignments, the ability to listen to children, and the ability to be democratic and fair.[2] Today, the latest craze is the product-orientated method of evaluation. Thus, trying to imitate industry, a considerable amount of evaluation is now centered on student achievement, test scores, the number of children failed, and the so-called objective data concerning what happens to the student as a result of being in a teacher's classroom.

Sidney Drumheller points out that after 75 years of educational effort to isolate the teacher traits or characteristics essential for effective classroom performance, little that is conclusive has been produced. As a consequence, those responsible for certifying, hiring, promoting, and firing teachers are left to their own devices to establish criteria for decision making.[3]

Purposes of Evaluation

Before we come to grips with the methods to be used in evaluating teachers, there must be a clear understanding of the purpose for the evaluation in the first place. As a Superintendent of Schools, it is clear to me that teachers are evaluated for two major reasons. First,

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teacher evaluation takes place for the specific purpose of improving the quality of instruction. The focal point for all public education is the learner. If board members, administrators, and teachers do not believe that this is so, then we have no right to be involved in public education. The second major reason for teacher evaluation is to identify those staff members who are perpetrating such crimes against youngsters that their removal from the classroom and from the profession is the major objective. In other words, the evaluation process in this instance is used to document teacher ineffectiveness so that termination can be accomplished.[4]

It is crucial for board members and administrators to keep in mind that the two major purposes of evaluation which I have just described are separate and distinct. Indeed, they are not the same. Evaluation for the purpose of improvement, in comparison to evaluation for removal from the system, requires different outlooks on the part of the teacher evaluator. The way public education is structured, the principal of the school is primarily responsible for teacher evaluation and it is incumbent upon that individual as a part of his job responsibility to perform both of these significant functions. At this time, I believe it is appropriate to spend a few minutes discussing the influence of the attitudes or perceptions of the teacher about this whole process of evaluation. Few of our teachers are terminated each year for inefficiency. If we would like to get a true answer to this statement, I could easily ask each of you who has supported the termination of more than four teachers last year to raise your hands. Therefore, the major emphasis in school districts is to improve the skills of most of its educators.

The Attitudes of Teachers about Evaluation

A recent study by Zelanak and Snider points out that the perceptions of teachers about the evaluation process are important. The study compared the attitudes of teachers who believed the intent of evaluation was for administrative purposes with those of teachers who believed that the intent of evaluation was for the purpose of improving instruction. The study indicated very conclusively that participating teachers who felt evaluation was for instructional purposes were supportive of evaluation. In contrast, teachers who felt that evaluation was for administrative purposes--dismissal, assignment changes, the involvement of permanent record files, teacher tenure--viewed the process in a very negative manner.[5]

The results of this study are not surprising. If teachers believe that the evaluation process will reduce their status or will be used in a detrimental manner as it relates to their job function, it is indeed predictable that there will be a negative reaction. It would also seem reasonable to expect that dedicated teachers who really believe that the principal's major goal is the improvement of instruction will be more open to suggestions for changing their approach to instruction.

There is no question that it is the responsibility of the principal to recommend teachers for promotion, demotion, and job termination. In addition, it is the principal who must observe in the classroom the type of instruction which is taking place, the relationship between the teacher and the students and the quality of learning imparted by the teacher. The role of the supervisor and the role of the teacher will not change in the foreseeable future. It is, then, very important to foster appropriate attitudes on the part of both the teacher and the principal so that meaningful and appropriate evaluation can take place. Here is an example of two different perceptions of the evaluation process--that of the teacher and that of the principal:

Teacher Perceptions of Supervision

The following is typical of a dialogue in the teachers' lounge:

Ms. Q.: Well, he was in again, but only stayed about 15 minutes.

Mr. R.: At least you're one ahead of me. He came in last week and only stayed 10 minutes...was called out on business.

Ms. Q.: When he came in today my kids straightened right up; and, whew, am I glad we were just reviewing yesterday's assignment. I think he thought I was well prepared.

Mr. R.: (laughter) Yeh, I think he only comes in because he has to.

But the principal's perception of that same visit is strikingly different:

Mr. P.: I really enjoyed being in your class this morning. The kids looked interested in what you were saying and you seemed well prepared.

Ms. Q.: Thank you. This class has a lot of good youngsters. I am so glad you came in today. You noticed that Sally has made a nice adjustment and everyone followed right along with the discussion.

Mr. P.: I'm sorry I couldn't stay longer but as you know I have the utmost confidence in what you are doing. Mrs. Q, I'm pleased to have you on my staff.

Although this vignette is fiction, the role perceptions it portrays are all too real. Generally, supervision is regarded very narrowly. Teachers perceive supervision as "that thing" the principal does once or twice a year prior to the evaluations. The principal perceives supervision as a major ongoing function. But because of other time demands, he is never quite able to devote more than 20 to 30 percent of his time to supervisory activities.[6]

ASSESSING TEACHER SKILLS IS NECESSARY FOR INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT

If we can all accept the fact that the attitudes of teachers can influence a willingness to be evaluated, then I would now like to spend some time reviewing teacher assessment procedures. Each of our districts utilizes some type of evaluation form. If after using whatever form is available in the district the principal has diagnosed his teaching staff and can categorize the teachers into those few he plans to document for termination in comparison to that group which he might categorize as in need of instructional improvement, we are now ready to review ways of assessing this latter group.

It has been my experience that the district's evaluation instrument is not the appropriate one to use for assessing the quality of the instructional program. The degree of individualized instruction utilized by each teacher, the use of learning centers and media centers in the classroom, the degree of differentiated reading material for the various skill levels in each classroom, the use of the diagnostic and prescriptive approach in the classroom, the arrangement of individual and small-group clusters in the classroom, and the degree of pupil-to-pupil interaction are the important criteria which need to be measured.

One assessment tool which can measure all of these components is called the I-Scale. It is a measure of the degree of individualized instruction occurring in the classroom. Using a continuum, the I-Scale differentiates between the teacher who individualizes and the teacher who does not individualize. The instrument also differentiates, at the two ends of a continuum, between the student who is the object of an individualized lesson and the student who is not the object of such a lesson.

In September of 1971, all of the elementary and middle school teachers in a New York school district were each observed for 45-minute periods. As a result of the data derived from the observations it was very clear that some teachers knew what individualization was and were indeed utilizing the process. But it was also clear that most of the teachers were not individualizing and didn't understand the process. An extensive inservice training program took place for a number of months after the initial observations.

In April of 1972, the I-Scale was again administered. There was a sharp contrast in the results of the post-I-Scale observations in comparison to the pre-I-Scale observations. Whether or not there was true improvement in all of the teachers is debatable, but it seems clear that many more teachers understood the individualized instructional process after participating in inservice training than they did prior to such training.[7] The regular teacher evaluation form didn't provide this information. Rather, a specific instrument which had been developed for assessing the individualized instructional skills of teachers was utilized for the initial identification

process and was again utilized a second time to document the improvement of the participants. Other instruments have been developed which provide similar information about the milieu of the classroom.

If, indeed, your school district is interested in evaluating or assessing the teaching skill of teachers for the purpose of improving the instructional program, I highly recommend investigating such a process. The diagnosis of the needs of teachers can take place at the school site level or on a district level. The important point to be remembered is the purpose for the assessment. If the assessment is for the purpose of improving instruction and not for termination, and this is clearly understood by the teachers, their willingness to participate in the improvement process will be greater.

THE USE OF VIDEO TAPE FOR ASSESSING THE SKILLS OF TEACHERS

One of the limitations of any assessment instrument utilized by an observer is that the participant is not the observer. The participant never gets a chance to see himself or herself participate in the teaching process. Since the teacher believes that he or she is individualizing, is using differentiated teaching techniques, and is more than meeting the needs of most students in the classroom, the comments of an observer or a review of the data collected by an observer might only have minimal effect on the perceptions of the teacher. The use of video tape as a diagnostic record provides a new dimension for the teacher. As the teacher observes himself on the video tape and discusses these observations with an understanding principal or curriculum specialist, the present mode of teaching in comparison to the desired mode can be planned. In addition, after a specified period of time, a second video tape can be utilized to point out the degree of improvement in the instructional process.

In Hempstead, New York, a video analysis project was undertaken with a high degree of success. Although only elementary school teachers were involved in this project, similar classroom recordings have been made of secondary teaching. At this time, let me share with you the views of some of the participants.

In describing the change which she had observed in her approach to teaching after analyzing the pre- and post-video tapes, one teacher said that she observed herself "shifting more responsibility to the children instead of leaving it with the teacher." A second teacher said, "I noticed a change to a more self-correcting approach for the children." She added that more of her time was now spent on diagnosis and prescription instead of secretarial duties.

The self-corrective value of the recordings was praised by the participant who found that viewing herself on tape "made me more aware of how I appear from another person's point of view. It helped me view my own difficulties and made it easier for me to correct the problems."

Although determining the degree of change in the instructor's teaching strategies is a significant use of the video replay, it is also important to specify why a change has occurred. One tape clearly demonstrated that "the children were given more alternative choices...in their own schedule, and each child developed with the teacher his own schedule according to his own needs." After viewing the first tape one staff member said, "I realized [the] noise level and organizational planning needed corrective changes." The tape also clearly reminded one teacher of the "loss of a student who created problems." The result of his removal was a more relaxed teacher, aide, and classroom.

Other comments related to specific classroom change were:

--I found that I am moving around more. The students are using each other for reference.

--The behavior of the boys has really changed. Together we realized that social reinforcement, verbal praises, pats on the back, hugs, smiles are very powerful for accelerating appropriate behavior.

--Students are doing more independent work. I am giving more individualized instruction. I have been able to get results from problem students that I could not get several months ago.

--Children are now on contracts--some daily, some weekly--and are moving about knowing what is expected of them. I am using more task cards.

Although the video taping was viewed initially by staff as a threatening and unnecessary invasion of privacy by the central office, the humanistic and helpful tone established by the consultants during the conferences convinced the teachers of the positive value of the districtwide assessment program.

Understandably, our Hempstead teachers were nervous about being video taped while teaching a lesson. Was this to be a new evaluation procedure? Would principals rate on the basis of performances observed on the tape, formally or informally? Would members of the board of education view the tapes and use negative performances of teachers to deny tenure at some future date? These were all critical questions that had to be answered prior to the initiation of the project.

Clearly, the intent of the assessment program was to determine the quality of instruction taking place in the classrooms--nothing more and nothing less. Once an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the teaching staff was completed, inservice training would be given in the use of classroom space and instructional materials, in the teaching of reading, and in employing a systems approach to individualizing instruction. To the credit of our

Hempstead teachers and our teachers' association, the district received support for the project and it was highly successful. That support was epitomized by the teacher who said, "We feel that the video taping was meaningful to us. We would like to have such evaluations more often."[8]

USER EVALUATION

This year in the Berkeley public schools we have initiated a program called User Evaluation. For several years, members of our Board of Education have believed that it is important to have the users of the educational services participate in the evaluation program. For us, the user evaluation process means that parents will evaluate teachers, students will evaluate teachers, counselors and principals, and teachers will evaluate principals. In addition, principals will evaluate the central office directors, coordinators, and assistant superintendents. The latter group will evaluate the superintendent.

Half of the teachers in our school district are evaluated each year under our normal teacher evaluation process. If a teacher is designated to be evaluated this school year, the students of that teacher's class and the parents of these students have an opportunity to participate in the User Evaluation process. Parents can share information with the school personnel in two ways. One is through a formal checklist-type, survey instrument which is mailed back to the school district. Second, the parents have the opportunity to make a formal observation of the teacher, during a teaching situation. Students from the seventh grade through the high school have been invited to participate in the process by indicating their views about the teaching-learning process by completing a survey form.

The first time that any new procedure is utilized requires some future adjustments if you plan to continue the process. We have had only fair success in implementing the user concept this year. Part of the problem has been related to the District's inability to establish an effective training program for participating parents. There has also been some misunderstanding on the part of parents as to the nature of the items which could be evaluated in depth. Secondly, I must indicate that the instruments themselves were the result of a joint parent, student, teacher and administrator committee and are probably not as complete as our school board or administrative staff would like. But we have made a beginning and we intend to improve the process for use again next year. The main point to remember is that parents can participate in the classroom evaluation process. In addition, the information they share with us will be incorporated into the principals' formal evaluation of teachers.

SUMMARY

Teacher evaluations tend to be like clothes. Whatever is in vogue at the time is utilized extensively by those who are attempting to remain modern and current. If you stay around long enough, the "hot" methods of today will probably recycle to be the new discovery of the future. In the end, each school district develops an evaluation process which is going to be most agreeable to the teachers, the administrative staff, the parents, the students, and the board of education. There is no perfect system. But whichever system is utilized, the purpose for which it is to be used should be clearly delineated and understood by all the participants. Again, the two major purposes of evaluation are the improvement of instruction and the documentation of inefficiency. We must, indeed, continue to document those staff members who are ineffective, inefficient, and detrimental to our school districts. But we also must spend more energy in diagnosing the needs of our staff and utilizing the information for the improvement of the instructional program.

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